

Long-Term Suspension of Students from the Regular School Setting Guidance

Local education agencies (LEAs) must keep in mind that the long-term suspension of a student from the regular school setting and moving the student to an alternative education program in a separate setting should be used as the last resort — and only when other interventions have not been successful in correcting unacceptable behavior. These situations include when the student’s behavior is so disruptive that the resources and interventions at the regular school setting have been unsuccessful in addressing the behavior or if the student is a danger to self/others.

If an LEA determines a student’s behavior necessitates the removal of the student from the regular school setting for more than 10 days, then the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) recommends LEAs give the following considerations for best practices in providing the continuation of quality education during the student’s removal.

	Key considerations for the provision of alternative education during long-term suspension (more than 10 days) of students from the regular school setting.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The LEA must have a Student Code of Conduct that clearly describes what type of offenses will result in discipline, and what the discipline will be for each offense. Section 160.261, RSMo. • The Student Code of Conduct should encompass student conduct regardless of instructional mode (i.e. virtual, onsite, etc.). If an LEA determines long-term removal is appropriate, the LEA should discuss the number of days the LEA will provide alternative education for the student, and the reason for the discipline with all appropriate staff, including the administration and teachers. The LEA should also discuss the reason for the discipline with the parent(s)/guardian(s) as well as the provision of alternative education and the expectations for their role with learning assignments.
Planning/Plan Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If an LEA suspends students for more than 10 days, then the LEA should immediately put together a team to develop a plan for the provision of alternative education services. • A team for such students should include representatives trained in providing health and mental health supports, including trauma-informed care (i.e., nurses, counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists). The goal needs to be to discover the root of the problem, to treat it, and to return the student to the classroom as soon as possible. • General considerations for each long-term suspension: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What services is the LEA currently providing to prevent problems and behavior that result in students’ removal from the classroom setting? Can this be improved upon? ○ What is the overall LEA/school plan for alternative education for disciplined students, whether it is in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, or an alternative education site? ○ What is the plan for parent/guardian communication? ○ Has a reasonable time limit been set for the suspension? ○ What standards, activities, technology, etc., are teachers using? ○ What methods of instruction will be used? ○ How will LEAs monitor instruction for each student? ○ What level of completion is expected for long-term suspensions, how many hours should these lessons take, and how long do the students have to return the lessons? ○ How will students receive credit for completed work? ○ What activities can the LEA design to enable students to transition back to and perform better in the regular classroom? ○ What counseling services will be provided for students who are suspended? Will the student participate in individual, as well as group, counseling sessions?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What community-based service providers, such as cooperative education programs, school-to-work programs, parents-as-teachers programs, programs developed by the Department of Economic Development and programs developed by local service delivery agencies, and other governmental and private agencies can help address the specific student needs beyond those traditionally addressed? ● As the above questions are answered, staff will be able to determine which plans and resources can be modified and can identify areas that will require supplemental or additional planning for students.
Pre-Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If an LEA suspends students for more than 10 days, then the LEA should consider the training needs of staff before implementation of alternative education days. Training and professional development are key. If a suspension should occur, teachers need to understand that the student continues to be engaged in the learning process. ● Possible needs include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Overall training in the provision of the LEA alternative education services plan. ○ Training in providing specially designed instruction for students who are receiving education outside of the regular school setting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training for teachers who teach the in-school suspension classes. ▪ Training for teachers who teach the out-of-school/long-term suspension classes. ▪ Training for teachers who teach in an alternative education setting. ▪ Training for teachers in building supportive relationships with the students, becoming a liaison to the teacher in the regular classroom and the administration, and fostering effective communication with the parent(s)/ guardian(s). ○ How to plan for supports students will need, including technology and assistive technology needs. ○ Parent/guardian training (for those who have students who are receiving alternative education services for a second time) on how to make accommodations or modifications; what is expected of the students in the coursework; and how to access the necessary technology, if appropriate.
Lesson Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Considerations for lesson design include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How many days will the LEA be providing alternative education services for the student? ○ How many lessons will be needed? ○ What standards are being addressed? ○ What are the expectations for rigor and quality? ○ By whom and how is quality going to be monitored? ○ How might lessons/activities be differentiated rather than completely changed? ○ What accommodations or modifications will be needed? ○ How will the LEA provide access to instruction? ○ Will technology be used and, if so, to what extent? ○ Will separate virtual classrooms be set up for students who are on in-school suspension? ○ Will a student on out-of-school suspension be able to participate in the regular classroom setting remotely? ○ Will the student need direct instruction from a teacher for lessons?

Technology¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure technology, if used for alternative education days, is accessible by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensuring the student has an internet device; and ○ Ensuring the student has internet access. • Ensure teachers are trained on the specific forms of technology and the platforms to be used on alternative education days. • Ensure parent(s)/guardian(s) are trained on the instructional use of technology and how to assist students who use adaptive technologies, should the student be at home.
Extracurricular Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The LEA should have a clear policy in place as to whether the discipline imposed includes removal from extracurricular activities. The LEA should also ensure that its policy is consistent with those of the Missouri State High School Activities Association.
Debrief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debrief immediately following the termination of alternative education days when the student returns to the regular classroom setting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What went well? ○ What did not work? ○ How was the transition back to the regular classroom setting? ○ What steps need to be taken to prevent a re-occurrence? • Solicit feedback from parent(s)/guardian(s), students, and staff.
Other Suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on communication with parent(s)/guardian(s) early and often about the student's behavior. • Consider the use of online resources available for students. • Create modules/lessons with accessibility to the internet in mind. • Save modules/lessons in multiple formats (i.e., PDF, Google, epub). • Plan lessons that incorporate assistive technology (AT) if the student is using AT in everyday lessons. • Stress the need for continuous communication, and reiterate the availability of assistance so students and parent(s)/guardian(s) can contact a teacher during alternative days to ensure ongoing support and uninterrupted instruction. Schedule "check-in" times for each student and/or general "office hours" for those students who are removed from the regular classroom and are at home. • Consider documenting the behavior of the student in the form of a behavior portfolio for each suspended student. The portfolio could include detailed incidents and may require additional training regarding what to include in the reports.

Further Guidance for Alternative Education Services provided in a separate setting (an Alternative Education Program)²:

If an LEA has an alternative education program — a non-traditional school or an attendance center that addresses not only the behavioral and social needs of students who have been removed from the regular classroom setting for disciplinary reasons — the program should provide competency-based curriculum with the goal of returning the student to the classroom or issuing a high school diploma or passing the [High School Equivalency \(HiSET®\)](#) test.

¹ LEAs that provide virtual education for suspended students will be reimbursed at the same attendance rate as for other virtual students.

² In the event an LEA places a student in an alternative education program for disciplinary reasons, it must first provide the student with the notice and hearing requirements outlined in § 167.161, RSMo.

It is important to ensure exemplary practices will be put in place for an alternative education program that result in accountability to students, parent(s)/guardian(s), and stakeholders. When alternative education grants were available in Missouri³, the legislature set forth criteria for evaluating applications in the grant process.⁴ These criteria give guidance for LEAs that are currently considering implementing an alternative education program in a separate setting. They include the following:

- (1) A comprehensive, kindergarten through grade 12 approach to preventing problems that result in the need for alternative education services;
- (2) Rigorous instruction in core academic disciplines;
- (3) Activities designed to enable the student to better perform in the regular classroom and to transition students back to the regular classroom when merited by their performance;
- (4) A student-centered approach whereby activities are designed to meet the particular needs of individual students; and
- (5) Collaboration with existing community-based service providers, such as cooperative education programs, school to work programs, parent-as-teachers programs, programs developed by the Department of Economic Development and programs developed by local service delivery agencies, and other governmental and private agencies to address student needs beyond those traditionally addressed by schools.

In addition to alternative education programs, the [Missouri Option Program](#) may serve as an alternative to the traditional school program. The Missouri Option Program permits full-time, public school enrolled students who are at least 17 years old and at risk of dropping out or not graduating with their cohort group the opportunity to earn a standard high school diploma. Graduation through the Missouri Option Program is not dependent on Carnegie credit attainment, but rather the program is competency-based and approved by the State Board of Education. The program utilizes a high school equivalency exam as content mastery for graduation purposes. The exam sanctioned by the state for the Missouri Option Program is the [HiSET®](#) test. Missouri Option Program students who successfully pass the exam and complete all other program requirements are eligible to receive a high school diploma. The Missouri Option Program is an effective means to retain students, lower drop-out rates, and improve college and career readiness.

³ These state and federal grants were last funded in 2009 and 2012, respectively.

⁴ Section 167.335.1, RSMo.

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